RAJYA SABHA

Wednesday, the 16th March, 2005/25 Phalguna, 1926 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

New vessels to Coast Guard

*201. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to provide new vessels to Coast Guard;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Coast Guard have decided to provide training to the police force of Coastal States; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Vessels are approved for induction in the Coast Guard as replacement for decommissioned platforms and for augmenting the strength of the Force. This is a continuous process being undertaken according to the identified roles that Coast Guard are required to perform.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. The Coast Guard has been providing training to the police forces of coastal States on receipt of requests for the same. The training is imparted at the Coast Guard Training Centre at Kochi. The training broadly covers navigation, communication, boat handling, safety and survival at sea, Maritime Law and boarding operations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 201. मैं माननीय सदस्यों से यह निवेदन करना चाहूंगा कि इस सत्र में अभी तक कोई भी ऐसा दिन नहीं आया है कि जिस दिन बीस क्वेश्चन्स पूरे हुए हों, मैं समझता हूं कि आज यदि मुझे आप लोगों का सहयोग मिलेगा तो मैं बीस क्वेश्चन्स पूरे कर दूंगा। इस तरह अधिक से अधिक माननीय सदस्यों को पार्टिसिपेट करने का भी मौका मिलेगा।

श्री दीपांकर मुखर्जी: ठीक है साहब, मैं सप्लीमेंट्री नहीं पूछूंगा।

श्री सभापति: पूछिए, पूछिए।

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Sir, my first supplementary is this. According to available information—it has also been reported in so many newspapers—with the coastline of 5,422 kms., 1197 islands, having vast Exclusive Economic Zone measuring 2.2 million sq. kms., the country does not have the necessary infrastructure in place to effectively protect the national interests. And also, as per the report appeared in ***The Hindu*** on 11th December, 2004, it was reported that illegal activities are increasing in many of the coastal ports of the country. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what steps the Government of India is taking to accelerate the vigilance of the Coast Guard in areas where country's security is at stake.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, first of all, I would like to assure the hon. Member and the House that since the induction of this organisation in 1978, through an Act of Parliament, the organisation is developing and currently the Coast Guard is divided into three regions—the Western Region, the Eastern Region and the Andaman & Nicobar Region. We also have five district Headquarters under the Western Region, four district Headquarters under the Eastern Region and two district Headquarters under the Andaman and Nicobar Region. The strength of the Coast Guard is: 6881 personnel, including 893 officers. The force level i.e., ships, aircraft hovercraft, etc., available at the disposal of the Coast Guard is like this. It has 59 ships, 44 aircraft and six hovercraft.

I do agree that the responsibilities of the Coast Guard have increased enormously because of certain factors. As the hon. Member has mentioned, certain illegal activities are also being carried on, sea pollution is a problem and ensuring the energy line to safety and security is also important. Very recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs, has also decided to acquire some ships and creating three additional stations for the Coast Guard and these will be placed at the disposal of the Coast Guard. The three Coast Guard stations, that is, at Varaval, Dhanu and Murud which have been identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs, will be looked into. The present arrangement, which is being done, is—and the main question also relates to training—we are also providing the training facilities, the institution located at Kochi provides the training. Normally, the trainings are expanded for a

period of four weeks. The State Governments are to indicate the trainees the persons who will have to be trained. The Ministry of Home Affairs has advised all the coastal States to avail of themselves this training facility, which is being provided at the Kochi Institute. The normal practice is up to three miles from the base line is normally looked after by the marine police stations; up to twelve nautical miles are looked after by the Coast Guards, and they can expand it up to twenty-four nautical miles. Beyond that, it is the reponsibility of the Navy. Therefore, keeping in view of our interest in the continental shelf, our interest in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the marine resources available, and the growing trends of sea pollution, all necessary steps are being taken.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Sir, I must be very thankful to the hon. Minister for this detailed and accurate answer. My second supplementary is, to protect the country's past exclusive economic zones, coastline under islands, which should have huge investment in the coming years, and to police the EEZ, many countries, including the UK, have shown keen interest in imparting their expertise—surveillance and policing—with regard to the EEZ. If so, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government has initiated any steps to collaborate with other countries in this regard.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, we are having some joint exercises and Coast Guards are also involved in it. The Navy is involved, in a very big way, in the joint exercises with various countries and other organizations. We are expanding these activities.

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. The hon. Minister has given a very exhaustive reply.In the Southern Coast, which is a vulnerable area, where the Coast Guard activities are being augmented, and where, apart from that, new vessels are being commissioned, some of the militant organizations, especially the banned organizations, like the LTTE, are involved in contraband, in all illegal activities. (*Interruptions*) Therefore, I would like to caution the hon. Minister that they have to strengthen the Southern Coastal area. I would also like to know whether the Government has any plans in this regard or not.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, we are already having a fifteen years' plan for the Coast Guards. The first five years' plan has already been implemented at the cost of Rs. 1,733 crores. And, as regards the number of vessels that is to be acquisitioned, I have already indicated, practically seventeen vessels are under construction in different phases, which will

be placed at the disposal of Coast Guards; and fifteen additional vessels, as suggested by the Ministry of Home Affairs, will also be placed. So far as the problem of smuggling is concerned, it is primarily the responsibility of the Customs Department. They have also their own machinery and the Coast Guards are working in close cooperation with them. If the problem acquires larger dimensions, the Naval force comes to their rescue. So, all these steps are being taken.

SHRI VEDPRAKASH P. GOYAL: Sir, the statement that it is an ongoing process and a continuous process indicates that no new decision has been taken. My question is: The hon. Minister has said that due to the importance of these areas, the Coast Guard requirement has increased very much. I want to know how many of the vessels have been decommissioned in the last five years? How long have they been decommissioned, and when will they be replaced? During this period, will this area remain without adequate number of safeguard vessels?

Part (b) of my question is about training. How many police forces have received training, and have been actually used in this force in the last 3-5 years?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Mr. Chairman, Sir, so far as training is concerned, training persons have been nominated mainly from Kerala. This year itself, there has been training. Normally. it is done from January. It is a four weeks training programme. In addition to that, one week Marine Course has been imparted to the Goa Marine Force. In addition, 241 BSF and 87 CISF personnel have also been trained. And, up till now, as I mentioned, in Kerala—97, Goa Marine Police—11, BSF—247, CISF 87, total 436 have been trained. We are encouraging more States to send their nominees to the training institutes.

So far as decommissioning is concerned, 17 vessels have been under acquisition in addition to those, which have been recommended by the Ministry of Home Affairs very recently.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next Question. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is a very relevant question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly, every question is important for you. Next question.